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ABSTRACT

Vocational education and training (VET) has been given greater emphasis in Australian schools with the inclusion of seven Framework courses that contribute to students' Higher School Certificate and also count in students' University Admissions Index scores. A study examined the perceptions of people involved in VET programs for year 11. Fifty-three students, teachers, parents, employers, VET coordinators, and aboriginal education consultants from two schools in rural New South Wales were interviewed using focus groups. Findings indicate that more students have been selecting VET courses. The practical focus, work placements, and relevance to career opportunities were key reasons for student participation. VET teachers reported that the competency-based assessments were appropriate and generally well received by students, but they were concerned about certification requirements for teaching the courses. Non-VET teachers believed the practical components of the VET courses were an advantage compared to the academic courses and that school-community partnerships were strengthened through the VET programs. Both groups of teachers expressed concern that structured work placements could adversely affect student performance in non-VET courses. One VET coordinator felt the VET courses reinvigorated students of lesser ability. The other coordinator agreed with that assessment, but also believed all students benefited. Parents felt that although the VET courses enabled their children to make more informed career decisions, the tension between work placement requirements and the timetable for non-VET courses needed to be resolved. (TD)

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Vocational education: Voices from the field

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Abstract

One of the significant changes that resulted from the review of secondary education in New South Wales or the McGaw Report (1997), was the introduction of Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses into senior school curriculum. The implementation of these VET courses commenced in 2000. This paper will focus on the responses or voices from the field in two rural schools to these VET courses during the first year of implementation. Responses and reactions from students studying specific VET courses and VET teachers will be compared to responses from non-VET teachers and parents of VET students.

Introduction

Although Vocational Education and Training (VET) has always had a place in secondary schools, since 2000 there has been an increasing emphasis and prominence given to VET in schools with the inclusion of seven Framework courses in Years 11 and 12. These contribute to a student's Higher School Certificate (HSC) result. Students may also elect to have one of these courses counted in their University Admissions Index (UAI) score, meaning the potential student clientele is wider than ever before. The NSW Director General of Education sees broad implications in these shifts, stating that the move to standards referenced assessment will eliminate "the out-dated and absurd distinction between academic and vocational courses in our schools" (Boston, 2001, p. 7). This paper focuses on the perceptions and responses of rural participants during the first year of implementation of VET framework courses in New South Wales schools.

While earlier VET courses continue, including the Joint Secondary Schools TAFE (JSST) courses and school developed 'Board Endorsed' courses, there has been a significant and surprising shift towards take up of the Frameworks Courses. Unlike JSST and earlier VET courses, these form part of the HSC. In 1995 the beginnings of this shift are to be found in the review of the NSW HSC headed by Barry McGaw,

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with the aim being a fairer, less complex and more rigorous qualification. This resulted in a strongly supported white paper, *Securing their future: The New South Wales Government's reforms for the Higher School Certificate* (1997). Nationally, the take up rate of VET in schools courses in senior schooling far surpassed predictions. Table 1 (MCEETYA, 2000) reflects this.

Table 1: Actual & projected growth of participation in VET in schools

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
	Actuals				Projections				
Yr 11-12 Projected Enrolments for Australia- [DETYA Statistics]	371,333	389,155	393,846	403,323	406,850	408,954	409,443	408,333	409,614
VET in Schools Enrol-ments	60,000	92,000	117,000	136,710	166,700	196,700	226,700	256,700	286,700
% Yr 11-12 Enrolments	16%	24%	30%	34%	41%	48%	55%	63%	70%

The range of vocational education courses available in NSW schools introduced under the new HSC VET Course Frameworks include:

- Business Services (Administration);
- Information Technology;
- Hospitality and Tourism;
- Construction;
- Metals and Engineering;
- Primary Industries; and
- Retail.

The research focus

The focus of this exploratory study was to seek the views and perceptions of those groups of people involved in vocational education programs in Year 11. The guiding research aims are:

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- to note and document a range of perspectives and experiences held by those groups on the experience of being involved in VET in schools; and
- to identify the range of issues emerging from each group.

For this study, two provincial rural high schools were selected in consultation with the District Superintendent of schools and the Vocational Education consultant in a rural region of New South Wales. School A was a large high school with an enrolment of 900 students located in a provincial rural city, while school B was a small high school with a student population of 320 located in a rural town.

The research subjects

In the process of identifying whom the research subjects would be, the authors recognised two levels of involvement. Firstly, there was the 'stakeholder' group, which included those people who were directly involved in the implementation of the VET framework courses. Members of this group were the VET teachers, the VET coordinators, employers of VET students and students enrolled in one or more VET framework courses. Secondly, there was the 'participant' group in the study who were indirectly associated with or affected by the implementation of the VET courses. Members of this second group were the parents of the students, the non-VET teachers at each school, and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

This identification process revealed the six key groups included in the study. A total of 53 people contributed to the study.

These groups were:

- the students – those students enrolled in Year 11 who were studying at least one VET course;
- teachers of vocational education courses – the teachers in each school who were directly involved in the delivery on the specific VET course;
- non-VET teachers – those teachers at each school who did not teach vocational education courses;
- parents – those parents of the Year 11 students studying a vocational education course;

- employers – the industry / employer representatives from the local area that had participated in the work placement component of the VET courses;
- VET coordinators – the within school vocational education coordinators; and
- aboriginal education consultative representatives.

The numbers in each group that participated in the study are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Focus groups

Subjects				
Stakeholders	***School A***	***School B***	***Others***	***Total***
Students	6	6		12
VET Teachers	5	5		10
VET Coordinators	1	1		2
Employers	4	3		7
Participants				
Parents	6	2		8
Non-VET Teachers	5	5		9
Aboriginal Consultative Group			5	5
Total				53

Methodology

Each group of subjects was interviewed by the researchers using focus groups. A focus group consisted of between 4 and 8 members, each of whom volunteered to be part of the study. Each interview ranged from 30 minutes to 60 minutes and was audio-taped. The taped interviewed was analysed by the researchers and emergent issues were identified. All data were collected during the early part of Term 4 in New South Wales. The interviews were conducted on site, and subjects were helpful and informative in their own context.

Selected findings

In this paper, the responses of the students, the VET teachers, the non-VET teachers, the VET coordinators, the parents, and the employers will be analysed and their perception of the initial implementation of the VET Framework Course will be discussed.

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VET teachers

Who teaches VET?

The group ranged in teaching experience from relatively new to teaching (3 years) through to very experience teachers with 25 years in schools. All teachers commented that they had chosen to seek certification to teach the vocational education courses as a result of training that was offered. The courses taught by these VET teachers included Information Technology, Retail, Primary Industries, Hospitality, Business Services (Administration), Hospitality and Tourism, Construction, Metals and Engineering and Primary Industries. School B also offered a course called Work Studies, which is a generic course which allows further opportunities for extra or extended work placement opportunities, but which does not contribute to the UAI. All teachers also had a substantial non-vocational education teaching load (at least 75%) in other curriculum areas.

Views on the VET curriculum

The teachers made the comment that following some initial problems about content and competency standards in their vocational education course the implementation of the new framework course was progressing smoothly. A number of teachers believed the new vocational education courses were an exciting and challenging innovation in senior schooling and that they were pleased to be part of this innovation in curriculum. Comments included:

> *'fantastic'*; (Teacher, School A)
>
> *'the more subjects come on board the more choices the kids have got'* (Teacher, School B)

Meeting the NSW Board of Studies' content and competency requirements for their VET course was not perceived to be a problem. The teachers found using the competency based assessment practices were appropriate and were generally well received by the students as being relevant to their work practices. Teachers did comment that there seemed to be many extra layers of requirements for vocational education teacher certification. In particular, at School A, the process of gaining Registered Training Organisation (RTO) status for the school had been a stressful experience.

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'The demands from outside agencies, TAFE and VETAB, are almost depressing to say the least.'(Head Teacher)

Finally teachers stated that the 'mix' of academic and vocational education courses was still evolving and that students did need more advice about Year 11/ 12 curriculum choice and their future career pathways. All teachers commented on the wide ability range in their students who were studying a VET course. For some students they were studying the course as an essential part of their chosen career path through to other students who had 'no idea' of a career after completing Year 12.

How is VET being implemented?

The implementation of the VET courses in 2000 was regarded as a benefit for all students as these courses increased the curriculum choice available to Year 11 students. The teachers believed that the VET courses needed to be time-tabled into the school day to ensure parity with other non-VET (academic) courses offered at the schools. At School B, the timetable was organised so that the VET work placement occurred as a block of time for the whole of Thursday each week.

Work placement

One of the key elements of the vocational education courses is the structured work placement experience. Ainley and Fleming (1997), Cummings and Carbines (1997) and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1997) suggest that the key elements of successful work placements include:

- strong coordination of the program;
- linked directly to the school based curriculum;
- the personal connection made by student to their school and work experiences; and
- the valuable learning experiences that are derived from the work placement.

When the students were on work placement, all teachers were concerned that the students would be missing other course content material. The teachers encouraged their students to seek assistance from these other teachers to 'catch up' the missed content. At school A, the students were required to sign a form which stated that they

would make up the missed content and missed assessment tasks in their other Year 11 courses. On the content within the VET courses, all teachers stated that these courses were well received by the students.

At school A, all work placements were arranged and managed by an outside agency while at School B, almost all work placements occurred within the small rural town community and were arranged and managed by an in-school coordinator.

Certificate 4 qualification

The requirement for all VET teachers to undertake the Certificate 4 qualification as a mandatory pre-requisite to being able to teach a VET course was seen as problematic by the teachers. They raised a number of issues and concerns about this qualification. One concern focused on this qualification being regarded as an alternate or 'back door' teaching qualification. The teachers were concerned that this was a way to bypass the normal 3 or 4 year pre-service teacher education course. Also, the teachers expressed the view that they had already trained as professional educators and course assessors, the VET Certificate 4 course was asking them to do the same things as they had completed successfully in their teacher education course a second time.

In summation

The VET teachers were:

1. highly committed to successfully implementing the frameworks courses in their schools;
2. confident that they would achieve the competencies described in the VET courses;
3. aware of the benefits for students in selecting a mix of VET and non-Vet courses in their Year 11/12 course of studies;
4. pleased with the way their students had responded positively to their VET course and the mandatory work place experiences;
5. concerned that the structured work placements could adversely affect their student performance in non-VET courses, and
6. concerned about the levels of external certification required before they were able to teach the VET course.

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The Non-VET Teachers

Who were these VET teachers?

A total of 9 teachers representing six Key Learning Areas were interviewed. They ranged from classroom teachers through to head teachers with a wide range of teaching experience (4 to 26 years).

Is there a relationship between their teaching specialisations and the new VET courses?

Some teachers were ignorant of the operation of VET courses at their school, eg. "I have no idea what VET means.' Other teachers perceived there were little overlap between the related VET course and their teaching area (e.g., Primary Industries and Agriculture). Some teachers believed there were some areas of overlap in content, especially in the senior courses e.g., formal language skills and the English courses. One teacher made the comment that the VET courses were perceived to have a much higher relevance to the real world than their own teaching specialisation, which this teacher saw as a distinct advantage for the VET courses. Some of the teachers taught Year 11 classes where they had no VET students while other teacher had some VET students in their 'mixed' class. Overall, the non-VET teachers had a limited understanding on the content and the potential linkages between the VET courses and their own teaching specialisations.

Benefits for the school in offering VET courses

All teachers believed the offering of VET courses was in the best interests of their students as it gave them a greater curriculum choice in Year 11. 'There are so many kids staying on to later years, I think that's the obvious answer, us being able to cater for a much wider range of kids and abilities and interests.' Some teachers also acknowledged a more personal teaching benefit as a result of the implementation of the VET courses at the school. These teachers stated that, in the past, there were always students enrolled in their courses who did not want to be there but had chosen their class as it was the 'best' option. Now they had fewer students in their class and those who were there were keen to study their course.

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The practical aspects of the VET courses were perceived by these teachers to be the significant reasons for students not selecting their teaching course. Also, many teachers expressed the view that the practical nature of the VET courses and the work placements had positive effects on students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Finally, a number of the teachers were aware of the positive effects on strengthening the relationship between the school and the local community through having the VET students undertake their work placements in the local community. One teacher commented that through the work placement program, the local employers now had a much more positive view of the young people, as they were now known to the employers.

Perceived problems with VET courses

The non-VET teachers identified two problem areas that directly impacted upon their teaching.

First, a concern that students enrolled in VET courses miss classes due to the work placement program. This meant these students were often behind in their study and assessment requirements in these non-VET courses. Further, these VET students were required to catch up their missed work as evidenced by the written undertaking signed by the VET students. Some teachers at School A believed the VET students did not catch up the missed work, 'They say they catch up, but I think practically speaking, they don't.'

Second, the way the school's timetable was constructed to cater for the work placement component of the VET courses was identified as a concern. At school B, the teachers stated that there was limited class attendance on Thursdays when work placements were occurring.

In summation

Non-VET teachers

1. held low levels of understanding about the organisation of 'content' within a VET course;

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2. had not explored how the links between a VET course and their teaching specialisation could be exploited;
3. believed that the practical components of the VET courses were a considerable advantage compared to academic school courses;
4. felt that school-community partnerships were strengthened through the VET courses; and
5. expressed concerns about the impact of work placements on the students continuity of conceptual development in their academic courses.

The students

Why choose a VET course?

The students were very impressive with a clear grasp of the benefits and potential difficulties in selecting VET courses as part of their senior studies. At School A, students only chose one VET course, which was partly a result of the way the time table lines for subject selection were arranged. In School B, on the other hand, four out of the six students interviewed had selected two VET courses, with two students selecting Work Studies as their second option. Students from each of the Frameworks courses were represented with the exception of Business Services (Administration), which is being introduced into School B in 2001. Students from both schools mentioned the fact that sometimes the VET courses were seen by students as the first ones to be discarded if one course was being dropped in Year 12. In fact, particularly in School A, students reported all VET classes had diminished in numbers both from students not continuing in this course or at school. Students selected these courses for a variety of reasons:

> *'I saw it counted towards the UAI and I enjoy it, so that's the reason I chose it.'*
>
> *'I chose it as a back up plan 'cos I want to get into nursing but if I don't make it, I want to go into hospitality.'*
>
> *'Experience and meet a few new employers. See if I can get a job out of it '*

What do the students think about VET courses?

Students from both schools commented on the difference they had noticed in the VET courses compared with their other courses. All expressed enjoyment in the more

practically orientated skills in the VET courses, and seemed to derive a sense of satisfaction from achieving competencies and being able to demonstrate success. There were favourable comments about these courses being "hands on ' and "it's better because we get to do stuff'. At School A, in particular, students commented on the different relationship between students and teachers in VET courses. "Teacher's not always over your shoulder looking at you. You've got work to do and you do it.' Comments about responsibility and taking control of their own learning followed this comment, and students were impressive in their identification of self-direction and responsibility in these courses.

How do students respond to the structured work placements?

As the two schools operate on very different systems, the comments reflected this difference. At School A, students have a week of block release per year for work placement. In School B there is one day per week dedicated to VET work placements. The discrepancy in hours dedicated to structured work placement reflects the choices a school can make to meet the requirements for the award of a Certificate 1, 2, or 3 qualification. This diversity of work placement arrangements is reflected in VET courses across Australian secondary schools (Malley, Robinson, Keating & Hawke, forthcoming; Smith & Green, forthcoming).

Most students enjoyed their work placement, although there was more enthusiasm exhibited by students from School B as the longer term and wider opportunities meant they felt more comfortable and confident in their workplaces. A student at School B said: 'You'll learn a lot more on the job than what you do here at school because there's more equipment on the job. There's a lot more you can do on the job because they're actually working on projects. In school, you can't work on a project that much....They show you how to do it and then they just let you do it and learn to do it....so that way it's a lot easier on you'. At School A. a few students had poor experiences at workplaces, as they were confined to menial jobs and not allowed to expand their knowledge. 'I'd need to get a bit more of the hands on experience with serving and cooking and that, and all I done was wash dishes and what dirty jobs there were, I had to do'. This student will get a different placement next time, and all students reported there was a process where you could select the same or different

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workplaces in subsequent stages of the course. Several students reported they had found part time or casual work through their placements, and one believed he would be offered a full time apprenticeship in the metal industry as a result of a very successful work experience. All students also mentioned the disadvantage of having to catch up for time and work missed through work placement, but most felt this was possible and that teachers and the system devised assisted them to do this in most cases. This was slightly at variance to the comments made by teachers.

In summation

1. Most students interviewed were very clear about their reasons for selecting VET courses.
2. These reasons were often, although not exclusively, very closely aligned to future career options.
3. Students seemed less clear about the linking of these courses and the UAI, although most students interviewed were not interested in University studies, with the exception of one person at School A. This student had specific goals in engineering he believed would be assisted by a VET qualification as well as a good UAI score.
4. Students identified differences in course matter, identifying it as more practical and related to real life skills.
5. Students also referred to a very different relationship with VET teachers, with the student teacher relationship being more like practices using adult learning principles.
6. More responsibility was perceived in self directed and motivated learning in VET courses.

The VET coordinators

Two models of coordination

The two VET coordinators interviewed saw their roles and responsibilities in very different ways as the arrangements varied in the two schools. In School A, all work placement arrangements are brokered through an outside agency. This means the VET coordinator role has a more 'in house' focus. The VET coordinator is also the deputy principal. He explained the role would normally be taken by the 'Leading Teacher'

(sic) but they had shifted roles to fit the predilections of the individuals. He has basically been involved in the introduction and implementation of VET in this school. The initial focus was JSST courses and the main job of the VET Coordinator was coordinating arrangements between the TAFE and the school. 'In the eighteen months that I have been doing the job it has certainly changed a lot' with the introduction of the Framework courses. School A is involved in a collegiate model with six local secondary schools. During 2000, School A went through a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) inspection, a major process for the staff. 'It's been a huge learning experience both for myself and also for anyone involved in the school in VET'.

In School B, the VET coordinator had a long history on VET in schools coordination, as she had been involved since the inception of the TRAC program. She was very proactive in seeking, monitoring and tracking funding, mainly from ASTF, for her position and role. She was also very involved with the organisation of work placements for each VET student, consulting with students, employers, community members and the Careers adviser. As she is situated at the school as both a teacher and VET coordinator, she is a direct link between the school, the employers and the community. The School B coordinator was very enthusiastic and passionately committed to VET in schools. She told the interviewers:

> *'Once students got into this program, they discovered it was a positive aspect of school whereas for some of them school had been a negative experience before.'*

Many years after completing the program, former students have often returned and commented on the fact that this program got them started, motivated and assisted them in their career success. The comments of the School B coordinator tended to focus on both the whole student and the outcomes for that student beyond school. The emphasis on outcomes and achievements for the School A coordinator was on dealing with inschool behaviours and performance. He commented several times on visiting VET classes, compared with the School B coordinator, who commented on student pathways and employers comments, visits to the workplace and beyond school outcomes. School A was also committed to VET programs and saw the benefits in terms of learning and attitude, particularly for students at risk or of lower ability.

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'... it's really rewarding to see that that sort of passion for learning is happening in this school'.

What are some of the perceived problems with VET in schools?

With larger numbers and a more urban situation, School A expressed concerns over duty of care and monitoring student movements. The coordinator stated:

'The biggest problem we are facing with kids going here there and everywhere that it is someone else's responsibility for attendance issues and all that sort of stuff.'

Both coordinators were concerned about continuity of funding. For School A, the removal of external coordination to set up work placements would make VET programs virtually impossible in the opinion of the coordinator. Funding was also seen as a crucial issue, in fact her position depended on continued funding, for the School B coordinator.

'We have to re-finance every year and every year we put a contingency plan in place in case we don't get funding to do it. '

She also felt that one aspect which was difficult was the 'amazing amount' of paperwork.

'From a practical viewpoint, there is no physical or funding support anywhere for all that admin. The school this year has been exceptionally supportive and has managed to fund me for one day a week admin, and I would not have survived without having it.'

The School A coordinator also found the competencies problematic.

'I think probably the biggest problem is that the competencies. The idea behind the competencies is that someone in West Australia can be doing the course and someone in NSW will be doing it and they will be exactly the same. The reality is that most of the competencies are so general you can make them anything you like, and the teachers in out school have found that as well.'

The School A coordinator was not a VET teacher, whereas the School B coordinator had taught predominantly VET courses.

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There were also differences in the perception of whose role it was to teach these courses. School A had a history of differences of approach with TAFE. Although some improvement was recognised, 'Slowly, TAFE is coming to the realisation that they really need to work with us', but there was on ongoing lack of trust and understanding. 'There is definitely a feeling among some TAFE teachers that teachers aren't qualified enough to do these courses'. The School A coordinator was also concerned about the viability of other vocational learning opportunities because of the amount or time, effort and resources consumed by the senior VET program.

> *'The down side might be that this may spell the end of Year 10 Work Experience.'*

What are some successes?

The School B coordinator believed that some of the success of the VET program may be attributable to the individual attention and training students receive particularly with some employers who she knows did not enjoy school themselves who were 'exceptional with the poorer student'. Both expressed some concern over the lack of support for most VET teachers to be able to visit their students at the workplace. The coordinator of School B believed she is almost a 'luxury' in this system by being a school based person who also has the role of visiting workplaces.

> *'In my case, I'm also employed to teach, so that's where my structures come in, but on a management level, you are actually managing an amazing amount of resources, both human and physical. We do an amazing amount of one on one...so again that is a luxury, but I feel the outcomes for our students have been exceptional and a worthwhile investment.'*

Once again, the emphasis in terms of success was on the in school experiences for the School A coordinator. 'When I go around and see what these kids are doing, I'm amazed at the quality of the work they do'.

In summation

1. Both coordinators saw practical and educational value in VET in schools programs.

2. For School A, where the coordinator played a major management role as well as coordinating VET programs, the value was situated with the students while on site at school with improved learning achievements and behaviour.
3. For School B, the enthusiasm of the coordinator rested on the beyond school outcomes for students, and the changes evidenced in the 'whole student' in terms of career pathways and opportunities.
4. The School B coordinator, who was involved in direct contact with employers, arranging placements and visits in workplaces, there was an emphasis on partnerships between the school and employers and the school and the community.
5. The School A coordinator saw the VET courses as a way of offering courses and opportunities to students of lesser ability and motivation to reinvigorate their learning and improve their self esteem.
6. While the School B coordinator would agree with these views, she expressed the view that all students, including those from the top academic stream, would greatly benefit from the opportunity to experience structured work placements as part of their school course.

The parents

Overall, the two groups of parents interviewed in the study held remarkably similar views about the VET course and their student's participation in the specific VET frameworks course. One general finding that emerged from both sets of interviews was the parents had a very general understanding about the school based and workplace based components in the VET course. Yet, they also expressed a lack of specific understanding about the content studied in the VET course and its contribution to the Higher School Certificate award at the end of Year 12.

Why did your child choose the VET course?

During our discussion with the parents about why their child had selected a VET course, parents' responses reflected a consistent view that their child had selected the course with little input from them. Some parents perceived the VET course as a transition link between the world of school and the work. Comments such as 'they get a fairly broad spectrum idea of what the job involves' (female parent), and 'help gain a job'; (male parent) supported this view.

What value was the VET course to their child?

Parents were able to identify two major outcomes from their child participating in the VET courses. Firstly, their child had developed a range of work-related skills and experiences through the VET courses that would be an asset when seeking employment after Year 12. Secondly, some parents believed that the VET course was beneficial in assisting their child to more clearly and realistically consider the options for their post school career path. As one parent commented: 'There are avenues that are open that we never see.'

Did the VET course influence the decision to stay on at school?

The response by all parents to this question was surprising. All parents commented that their child would have continued on into Year 11 and 12 irrespective of whether a VET course was available or not. However, some parents then qualified this comment by stating that the VET course had assisted their child in deciding what other HSC courses they should study.

Other comments from the parents

The final part of the interviews elicited additional comments from parents about the VET courses. Two areas were reported. First, the impact of the structured work placement on their child's other academic courses was identified. In particular, parents were concerned that their child was missing lessons in non-VET courses while completing their work placement. *'they're missing lessons in ....., I'm very concerned about that.'* Second, parents praised the way in which employers and the VET teachers treated the students as adults in both the workplace and as learners. This change reflects one of the key differences between the VET courses and the other non-VET courses studied at school and was emerged as an important difference in the interviews with the students at each school.

In summation

Parents believed that:

1. their child had chosen to participate in the VET course on their own volition;
2. the VET courses offered a range of experiences and skills that were valued by employers, VET teachers and their students;

3. the VET courses provided an avenue for their child to make more informed career path decisions; and
4. the tension between work placement requirements, the school's timetable and other non-VET course requirements still needed to be resolved.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper, the actual and projected participation rates in VET courses in schools were reported. The significant trend from these quantitative data is the increasing proportion of students who will select a VET course. Our exploratory research project provides some qualitative insights into and explanations for the reasons why student are selecting these VET courses. Our research clearly indicates that the practical focus, the work placements and the relevance to post school career opportunities are key reasons for student participation. These findings are echoed in the comments of the VET teachers, VET coordinators and, to a lesser degree, the parents of the students. Finally, both VET teachers and non-VET teachers are concerned that the students adopt a balanced approach to meeting the course requirements of their VET and non-VET senior courses of study.

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